

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

1-49. (Cancelled).

50. (New) An automatic method for the production of SO₂ from the combustion of elemental sulfur and pure oxygen, comprising the steps of:

feeding liquid sulfur into an atomizer in a burner;

atomizing the liquid sulfur in the burner together with return SO₂ and pure oxygen; and

producing oxidative combustion of the liquid sulfur and the pure oxygen in a combustion chamber to produce SO₂ in the presence of the return SO₂, wherein the return SO₂ is used as a cooling and diluting agent for the reactants taking part in the oxidative combustion in the combustion chamber, oxygen not consumed during the oxidative combustion is returned to the combustion chamber together with the return SO₂ to be reused, and the temperature of the oxidative combustion of the liquid sulfur does not exceed 1250°C, wherein the temperature is controlled by automatically controlling a defined ratio of S, O₂ and SO₂, by measuring and controlling with respective flow sensors the flow of return oxygen, the flow of return SO₂ and O₂, the flow of the pure oxygen and the flow of the liquid sulfur to the chamber.

51. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein the return SO₂ corresponds to at most 80% of the SO₂ produced in the oxidation of the sulfur.

52. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein an S : O₂ : SO₂ ratio, expressed in grams, entering into the combustion chamber in the range of from 32 : 32.63 : 243.42 to 32 : 333.6 : 262.64.

53. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 52, wherein the S : O₂ : SO₂ ratio, expressed in grams, entering into the combustion chamber is about 32 : 32.63 : 256.23.

54. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein regulation of pure oxygen entering as a reactant into the combustion chamber is carried out in the flow sensor that measures the oxygen returning to the combustion chamber, after steps of purifying and cooling of the SO₂ produced.

55. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 54, wherein the regulation of the pure oxygen added to the return oxygen before entering into the combustion chamber is carried out based on a proportional valve controlled by the return oxygen flow sensor.

56. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 55, wherein the amount of oxygen entering into the combustion chamber is controlled to be at a 2% - 5% excess relating to the stoichiometric value of S and O₂.

57. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein liquid sulfur enters into the combustion chamber at a temperature of between 130 and 135°C, which temperature is maintained by steam produced in a multistep heat exchanger post-combustion chamber.

58. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein the oxidative combustion is produced from the liquid sulfur in a pulverized microdrop state produced in the atomizer of the burner.

59. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein the combustion chamber is maintained at a temperature higher than 1100°C and lower than 1250°C.

60. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 59, wherein the combustion chamber is maintained at a temperature of about 1167.5°C.

61. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein the SO₂ produced contains SO₃ which is absorbed in counter current flow in a 98% H₂SO₄ tower.

62. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein between 20% and 30% of the SO₂ produced and remaining unreacted oxygen are cooled in a cooling liquefaction unit, operating at a temperature of between -10 and -60°C, to liquefy the SO₂ into liquid SO₂.

63. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein between 20% and 30% of the SO₂ produced and remaining unreacted oxygen are cooled in a compression cooling liquefaction unit, operating at a pressure of between 3.8 and 5.0 bar, and a water cooler to maintain them under 32°C, to liquefy the SO₂ into liquid SO₂.

64. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 62, wherein the liquefaction of the SO₂ is favored by the absence of an uncontrolled excess of oxygen mass and a higher concentration of gaseous SO₂.

65. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 62, wherein up to 80% of the SO₂ as a total volume not passing through the liquefaction unit is sent back as the cooling and diluting agent to the burner of the combustion chamber.

66. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 50, wherein the SO₂ produced has a purity above 99.90%.

67. (New) The method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 66, wherein the sulfur content of the SO₂ produced is under 2 ppm.

68. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 67, wherein the greatest impurity in the final SO₂ produced in a liquefied state corresponds to the polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons contained in the original sulfur and do not exceed 0.05% by weight.

69. (New) The automatic method for the production of SO₂ according to claim 68, wherein the aromatic hydrocarbons of the impurities are sulfonated after the sulfur oxidation.